

From East to West: Persian, Indian and Central European Themes Forming the Architectural Scenery in Early Modern Ottoman Culture

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1 ABSTRACT

This study aims to define the changes in architectural scenery and cityscape in Ottoman cultural life in early modern era, i.e. 18th century. It is aimed to complement intercultural relations in this age through surveying the foreign impacts on Ottoman architecture. Istanbul, as the capital city, the cultural center of the Ottoman Empire, located between the two worlds: the East and the West, considered as an ideal example for this study.

The 18th century for Turkish architecture was a “receptive” age which combined with the wish for innovative experience in all manners, and can be identified as the century of “change”. The exchange of artistic and technical models between the Ottoman cultural era and the rest of the world increased rapidly and extensively at the beginning of the century. In the first decades of the century new period of renewal, called as the “Tulip Period”, appears. Beginning with this period traditional, introverted manner of the society began to change; they started to use the open and public areas more frequently for enjoying themselves. Small public buildings as libraries, primary schools, “sebils” and public fountains were built in major cities. The survey on Ottoman buildings of these decades shows us that different themes from India to Persia were used as source of “inspiration” to create this new décor for the architecture and public spaces. On the other hand in the middle of the century, some radical changes, completely deviated from the principals of traditional ones, appear in Ottoman architecture. It was in this period that the new style, later called, “Ottoman Baroque” was born. Local tradition revealed here an impressive ability for adaptation of Baroque methods and Rococo ornamentation. Ottoman architects and patrons, after 1740, seemed to prefer to use the Western Mediterranean and Central European iconography instead of the Eastern one as source of novelty.

Still as a traditional society Ottomans tied to its past, sometimes resists to economic and political reforms; but it is interesting that the architectural transformations were easily accepted by great masses. Artisans developed, with remarkable rapidity, a synthesis of styles and freely borrowed forms from distant cultures and regions, and playfully took up themes both from Asia and Europe to decorate the cities. This innovative modeling brought a prosperous new way to Ottoman cityscape and architectural design in early modern period.

2 EARLY YEARS; 1718-1730

The first Ottoman sultan in the 18th century; Ahmed III, was coroneted on 22 August 1703. Nevertheless, the changes did not begin until 1718; the year that Ibrahim Pasha took office in Babiali (Supreme Porte) as The Grand Vizier. Soon after, with the mediation of British and Dutch ambassadors, Ibrahim Pasha managed to set up peace with the Habsburg Monarchy and the Venetian Republic in the Treaty of Passarowitz. After this treaty, Sultan Ahmed III, under the guidance of Ibrahim Pasha, pursued a peace and stability policy all through the Empire both in domestic and international issues. This policy favored a settled life in prosperity; and during this period, the Ottoman Empire seemed beginning to direct itself towards the global developments of the world. Afterwards, for the first time the Ottoman Empire sent various ambassadors to European cities to experience contemporary European customs and life (Unat, 1992 p.53). The Ottoman Empire also embarked on new economic and cultural policies and programs during this period: Istanbul's first fire brigade was established, new manufactories such as tile, textile and paper factories were founded, and the first printing press for Turkish was set up (Genc 2000 p.180). Moreover, many public libraries were founded, important masterpieces in Arabic, Greek, and Persian literary works, were translated into Turkish (Evin 1980 p.135). Istanbul, the capital city, was refurbished; its monuments restored, city water system recovered and improved. In Ottoman historiography, this period of renewal between 1718 and 1730, came to be called as the “Tulip Period” after the epoch’s passion for tulips.

The Tulip Period also appeared as new era of cultural and artistic improvement. Ahmed III was a cultivated patron of art and architecture. His court became a meeting place for artists, poets, painters and intellectuals, where they were encouraged to create their best work. Elite circles were introduced to a new awareness of the pleasures of conversation in intellectual meetings held in private palaces, kiosks, and gardens (Sakaoglu 2000 s.322). Beginning with the Tulip Period, the sultan, the upper class and the elites in the Ottoman Empire, seemed to rediscover the joys of earthly life. Novel festivities, garden parties during the day and night became an important part of this new cheerful life. The traditional, introverted manner of the society began to change; people started to use open and public areas more frequently for enjoying themselves. Daily promenades, public meadows, gardens with small fountains and pavilions, and summer palaces became popular (Hamadeh 2007 p.65). Waterside residences, pleasure mansions by the sea (*Sahilsaray* or *Yalı* in Turkish) were constructed on both sides of the Bosphorus and Golden Horn. During spring and long summers, the Sultan with his retinue began to live in summer palaces in the country side of Istanbul instead of congested life in the walled Palace of Topkapi (Arel 1975 p.45).

Sadabad Palace, constructed in 1722, was one of the biggest among these imperial summer palaces of the 18th century; it is also considered as the first example of the new architectural style of the era. Even though the palace was destroyed after a riot in 1730, it is possible to reconstitute the site plan with accuracy (Fig.1). This palace was located by the river of Kagithane, better known as “Sweet Waters of Europe”, and consisted of a large meadow, a water canal (known as “*Cetvel-i Sim*”-Silver Line), cascades and many pavilions. Ahmed III also invited many state officers to build their kiosks nearby the palace area (Erdogan 1962 p.72). As a result, the river valley was filled with beautiful buildings, gardens and merry crowds streaming in from the city.

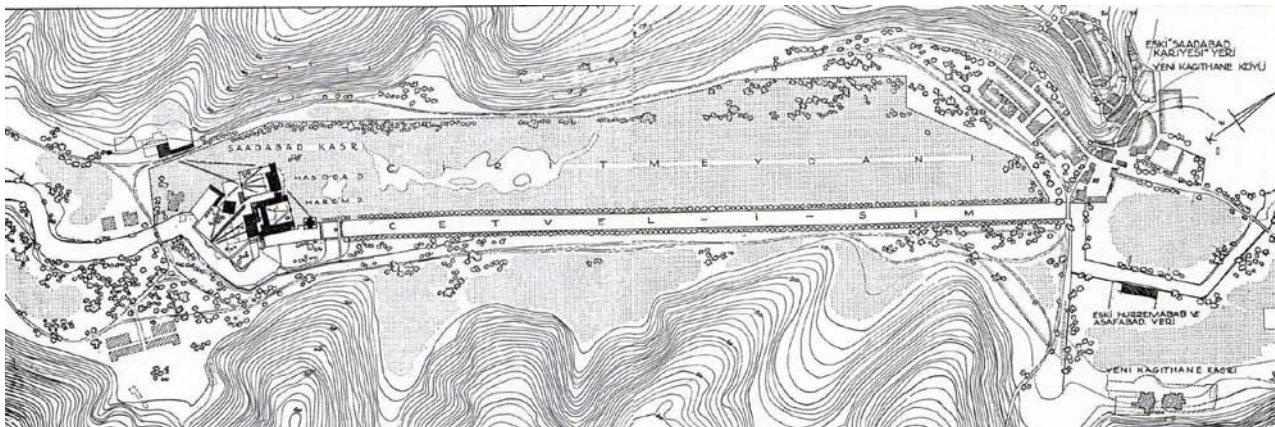


Fig. 1: Site plan of Sadabad Palace (Eldem 1977)

Sadabad Gardens were thought to be largely inspired by the gardening techniques used in contemporary French palaces, described in the celebrated memoirs of statesman Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi who was an Ottoman ambassador to Louis XV in 1720. Yirmisekiz Mehmed Çelebi’s embassy of eleven months was notable as the first ever foreign representation of a permanent nature for the Ottoman Empire in a European capital. Besides, this visit brought widespread cultural exchange between two countries¹. On his return to the Ottoman capital, Mehmed Çelebi presented his contacts, experiences and observations to the Sultan in the form of a report-memoir. In this memoir, he describes his journey to France, his reception by the child-king Louis XV, the ceremonies and the social events in which he participated. In his report Çelebi, also gives a splendid account of the French Palaces he visited in Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Versailles, Trianon, Marly, Vincennes, Villeroy, Tuileries, Chantilly, Fontainebleau and Orleans. It is not clear but Ottoman envoys might have brought back some drawing and plans of these palaces and gardens (Unat 1992 p.53-58).

However, apart from the site plan and the canal, it is impossible to find any reminiscent of French influence in this building complex of the early 18th century. Eldem argues that there are more similarities between Sadabad Palace and the Safavid or Indian-Mogul culture in terms of architectural form and details (Eldem

¹ Mehmed Çelebi’s mission caused a new wave in Paris: “Turquerie”, which can be summarized as a euphemism for interest in all things Turkish. In European culture and institutions, it became fashionable to collect Turkish objects of various kinds for their sheer exotic value.

1977 p.73), rather than reminiscences of the French model. Actually, many artistic novelties prior to the Tulip Period can be attributed to the imitation of Persian-Indian traditions, in general.

In 18th century Ottoman architecture, particularly when the theme was “pleasure”, “recreation” or “spectacle”, the architectural repertoire of the East seems to be the main source for the designs. The public fountains, that are characteristic for the century, are the best example for this attitude. The voids within the city were crowned with these monumental, richly decorated public fountains that display themselves to all passersby. These monumental fountains, in city squares and parks, were new challenge for Ottoman artists and have some architectural elements that are unusual for Ottoman architecture tradition but similar to Persian-Indian examples; such as water canals, multi-foil arches and decorative teeth motifs (Fig.2, Fig.3, Fig.4). "Indian interest" in 18th century Ottoman architecture was so admired that, even the small decorative bird pavilions on the walls of the buildings seem to be inspired by Indian palaces (Fig.5).

It is not clear how cultural interactions between the Ottoman buildings and the Persian-Indian ones had occurred. Although, merchants, ambassadors, pilgrims have been known to travel among these regions (Farooqhi 1986), there is no information about the direct artistic exchange between these cultures in 18th century. Ottoman documents and recourses of the date, in music, poetry, literature and names of the buildings, gave many references to the Eastern cultures, generally Persia-Central Asia-India region. We can say that; “one thousand and one nights” ideal life of the Tulip Period considered Persia and India as its model. Persia and India became the points of reference for the innovative imagery of the Tulip Era, since they were then regarded even by the average Ottoman, educated or not, as “the symbol of refinement” (Cerasi 1997 p42).

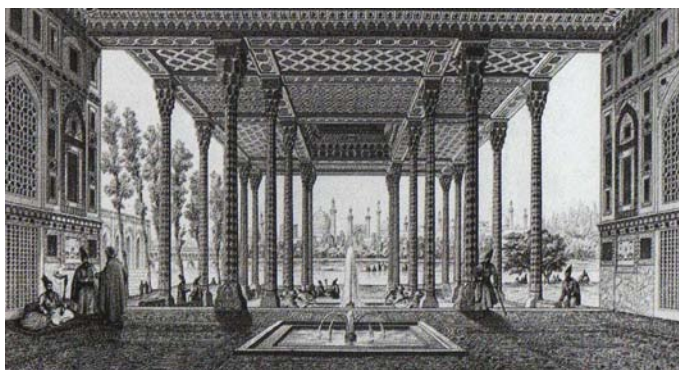


Fig.2: Comparison of water element; Left: Cihil Sutun Kiosk, Isfahan, 17th cen., Right: Fountain of Beykoz Ishak Aga, Istanbul, 1746

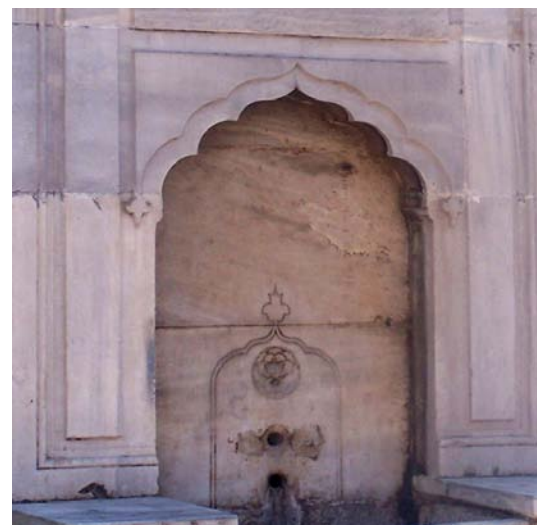


Fig.3: Comparison of arches; Left: Divan-i Has, Delhi 1640–1648, Right: Fountain of Genc Mehmed Pasha, Istanbul 1728-1729



Fig.4: Comparison of decorative “teeth” element on arches; Left: Entrance to City Palace, Jaipur, 1729-1732, Right: Fountain of Bereketzade, Istanbul, 1732



Fig.5: Comparison of architectural models; Left: Palace in Udaipur, 1559-1725, Right: Bird-house on the wall of Ayazma Mosque, Istanbul, 1760-61

3 AFTER 1740: OTTOMAN BAROQUE

The end of the Tulip Period was marked by the rebellion of Patrona Halil in 1730. Eventually, Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha was decapitated; Ahmed III was forced to abdicate the throne to his 35 year-old nephew Mahmud I on 1st of November 1730 (Aktepe 1958 p.54). During the early years of Sultan Mahmud I’s reign, the architectural style seemed to continue the style of the Tulip Era. However, 1740 marks the end of a significant period in Ottoman architecture; from then on, some radical practices emerged, completely deviating from the principles of the traditional ones. The year 1740 was also a milestone for the whole country. The Ottoman Empire signed the Belgrade Treaty on 18 September 1739 with Austria and Russia under the mediation of France. Furthermore, the danger of Iran on the eastern frontier was diminished by the death of the Iranian sovereign Nadir Shah in 1746. Thus, the new period of “the Long Peace” that was characterized by the total absence of military conflicts, began² (Palmer 1994 p.61). It was in this period that a new style, later called, “Ottoman Baroque”³ was born.

Fountains and *sebils*⁴ were the first buildings in which the new style became most apparent, since they were ideal objects for creative experimentations. They were small buildings, compared to mosques, palaces, madrasas etc, consequently it was easy to apply novel details on these buildings. These sebils and fountains, in their extraordinary appearance, were built side by side with the traditional style mosques and other monumental buildings during 1740s (Fig.6). This contradictory phenomenon ended with the construction of

² This peace between the Ottoman and neighbouring powers ended in 1768 with the Russo-Turkish war. The Period between 1739 and 1768 was exceptional for Turkish history, as 28 year of peace was never again achieved until the foundation of the Republic in 1923

³ In this paper, the term “Baroque” is used as a term of architectural concept. Its formation, meaning and historical development is quite different in Ottoman Empire than the Western Europe

⁴ Sebils are public buildings, like a small kiosk, for the distribution of cold drinking water, sweet drinks or “serbet” in cups to passers-by

the Nuruosmaniye Building Complex. Planned as a large “selatin” (royal) building complex by Mahmud I, and completed by the succeeding Sultan Osman III in 1755, Nuruosmaniye Complex houses the first and the “most” Ottoman Baroque mosque of the century. The mosque’s courtyard is the first and unique example of semi-elliptical plan in Ottoman architecture. Its marble facades give it its unique appearance, which also distinguishes it from the former ones (Fig. 7). After Nuruosmaniye, baroque motifs are not only found in the decoration of sebils, but in monumental buildings and mosques as well.



Fig. 6: Medrese and Sebil of Hasan Pasha, Istanbul, 1745

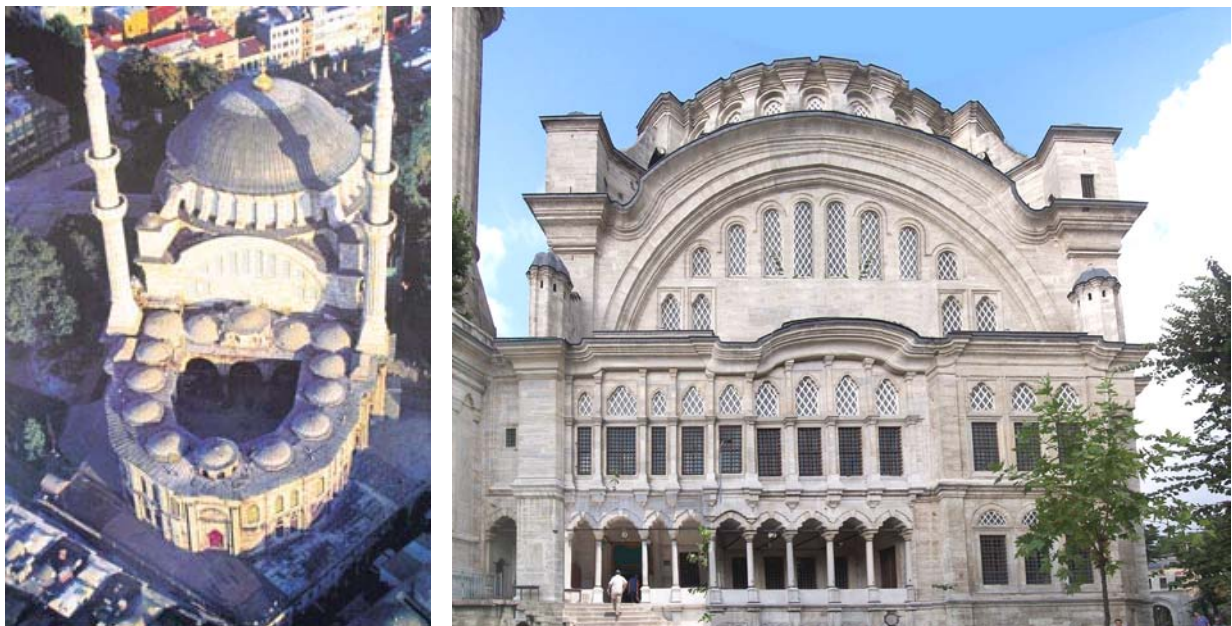


Fig. 7: Nuruosmaniye Mosque, Istanbul, 1749-1755

The main features of the new architectural style of 1740s are: symmetry in facade, curves in plan, and more architectonic ornamentation instead of arabesque motifs. This period’s buildings create a strong illusion of depth; plasticity increases, and high reliefs are almost like sculptures. Curved lines are predominant in the building decoration of this period; forms tend to be elliptical, circular and wavy. Additionally, the mouldings show great refinement; walls are decorated with the frequent and novel use of columns, column strips, semi-columns and pilasters. For the first time in Ottoman architecture, capitals are decorated with acanthus leaves or volutes recalling Corinthian and Ionic capitals; arches are transformed to the undulating ones known from Italian Baroque architecture. The most significant innovation, concerning the appearances of buildings, are: verticality, a certain theatricality of the facade elements, and almost palatial appearance of the surfaces.

These changes visibly recall the architectural vocabulary of Western Europe. A review of Ottoman buildings that were constructed after 1740, shows us that European architectural detail, elements, design principles were used as source of “inspiration” (Fig.8, Fig.9). The surveys show that, there is no single or specific area,

period, style or building type in European architecture that inspired 18th century Ottoman architecture. We can say that the 18th century artists who were working in Istanbul, had an almost random, eclectic in a way, attitude towards European examples instead of conscious choice of specific style. The sources of inspiration were in some cases from France as well as Italian Peninsula, sometimes from German speaking countries; sometimes a detail from a palace, sometimes an architectural element from a church was copied. Although the new style was first seen on the architectural details; such as capitals, columns, cornices etc., European influence on 18th century Ottoman architecture can be traced even in the plans. The most prominent examples are the Library of Atıf Efendi in 1741 (which can be compared with Cathedral of Pienza 1459–1462); the Refectory of Nuruosmaniye in 1749-1755 (which can be compared with Hotel Lambert in Paris 1640-1644); and the Library of Nuruosmaniye in 1749-1755 (which can be compared with Church of S. Carlo alla Quattro Fontane in Rome 1634–1682) (Fig.10, Fig.11).

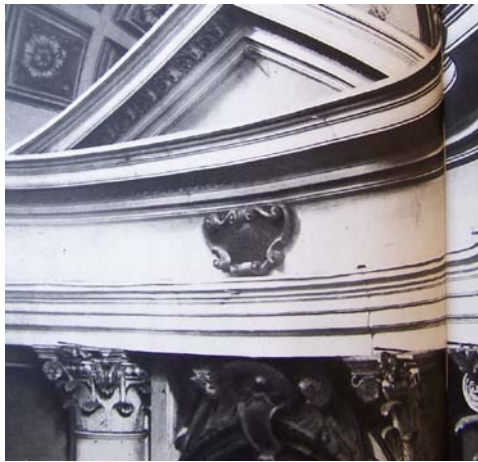


Fig. 8: Left: Decoration of Church of S. Carlo alla Quattro Fontane, Rome, 1634-1682, Right: Exterior decoration, Sebیل of Nuruosmaniye, Istanbul, 1749-1755



Fig. 9: Left: Column order at the facade in Church of S. Carlo alla Quattro Fontane, Rome 1634–1682, Right: Column order in Fountain of Seyyid Hasan Pasha Han, Istanbul, 1745

These examples show that in no doubt, 18th century buildings in Istanbul were built by master-builders or architects who were aware of European examples. We may wonder through which channels the European influence reached the Ottoman capital in early modern years? At that time the Baroque in Europe was long over. In Mahmud I's reign, there are no records about any Ottoman artist who had gone to Europe for

education or to examine the buildings on site⁵. There is not enough evidence about any European architects who had worked in Istanbul in the early years of 18th century. As an alternative explanation one may well suppose that local master-builders or architects examined just and only the drawings of contemporary European buildings, and then tried to put them to practice in the capital, offering their own interpretation. This explains why the Library of Atif Efendi, the Refectory of Nuruosmaniye and the Library of Nuruosmaniye have totally different exterior compositions from European examples that they imitated in plans.

Illustrated architectural books have had an important effect in stimulating the circulation of architectural models in Europe during the 18th century. It is not too hard to imagine that similar publication might have reached Istanbul and they may have landed into the hands of Ottoman artists. Actually, it is recorded that some picture albums or books were brought to Istanbul before the construction of Sadabad Palace (Boppe 1989, Mamboury 1937), and Nuruosmaniye Complex⁶ (Dallaway 1797 s.103, Walsh-Allom 1836 s.12). So we can say that architecture books, illustrated catalogs and similar publications from Europe probably affected the Ottoman architects and formed the intercultural contacts between Europe and the Ottoman world in early modern age.

Thus 1740s was the era that European style in Ottoman architecture began with. In the previous centuries, the Ottomans had been open to many aspects of European influence, but it was only after the 18th century that European architecture became overpowering. European-style art seemed the most appropriate form for search for novelty in Ottoman architecture after 1740. Baroque methods and rococo ornamentation revealed here an impressive ability for adaptation of local tradition and typological inventions (Cerasi 1997 p47). The European architecture constituted a new pool for the Ottoman artists' imagination. They used European models as a new storehouse of images, along with the former traditional models of the previous centuries.

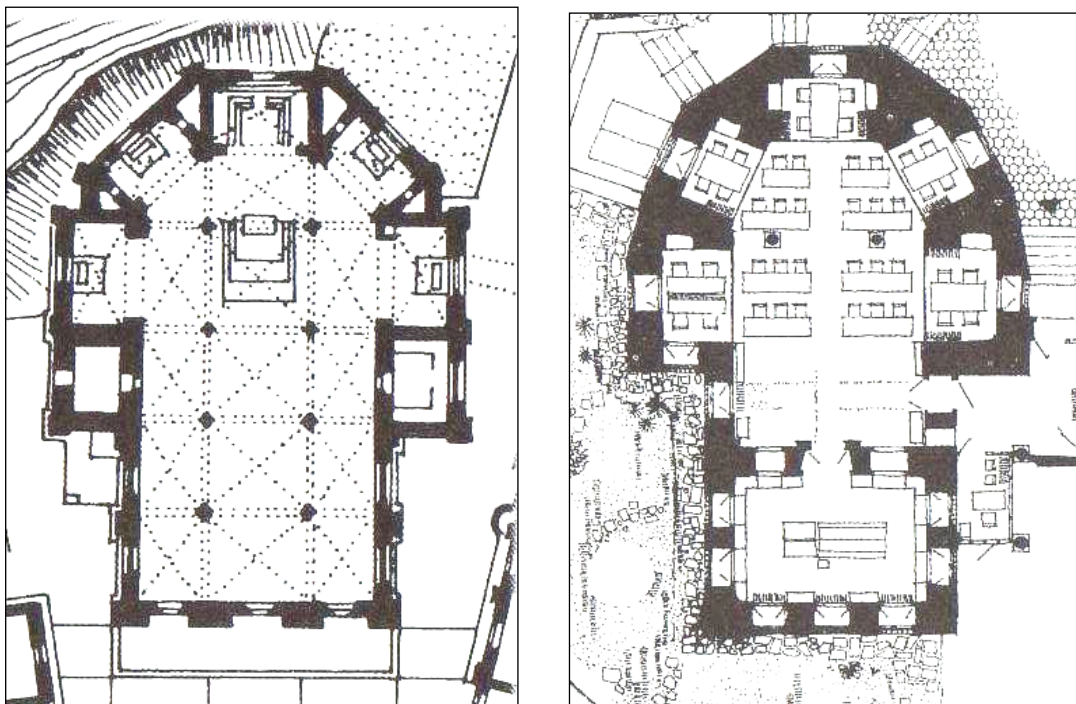


Fig. 10: Left: Duomo of Pienza, Pienza 1459–1462, Right: Library of Atif Efendi, Istanbul 1741 (Saner 2005)

⁵ As far as determined, the oldest record about an Ottoman who educated art in Europe is from Mustafa III reign (1757-1774) (Arel 1975 p.12).

⁶ It is not sure which books were used. Gul Irepoğlu, in her study, has determined large number of European printed books in the Topkapi Palace Library (Irepoglu 1986 p174), although almost all of them are about gardens.

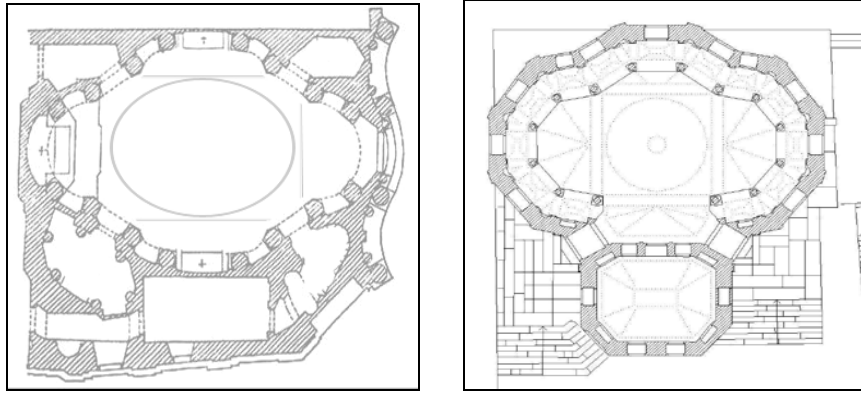


Fig. 11: Left: Church of S. Carlo alla Quattro Fontane, Rome, 1634–1682, Right: Library of Nuruosmaniye, Istanbul, 1749-1755

4 CONCLUSION

The reasons behind the changes in Ottoman architecture of these periods are various. First, after a long period of “classical” Ottoman style, which lasted since 1450s, the artists and patrons might have started to seek for “novelty”. Beginning with the 18th century, Ottoman architects and patrons were in search of a new architectural vocabulary for the expression of the new era. During this century, artisans developed, with remarkable rapidity, a synthesis of styles and freely borrowed forms from distant cultures and regions, and playfully took up themes both from the East and from the West, to enrich its architectural practices and thematic repertory. First, the imagery of Persian - Indian Mogul imperial tradition was borrowed, then after 1740, European styles were referred to. During these syntheses it should be noted that Ottoman patrons or artists gave no particular or political meaning to the new architectural style, it was just search of a new look for the new built environment (Cerasi 1997 p43). All these fresh motifs enriched the vocabulary of the Ottoman artists, and were successfully used with the combination of old forms that have traditional models of the former centuries.

We can consider the 18th century, as a period of architectural novelties within the internal dynamic of the Ottoman tradition. The Ottoman culture produced its ideal spaces within the continuity of its artistic and social tradition. Still as a traditional society Ottomans tied to its past, sometimes resists to economic and political reforms; but it is interesting that the architectural transformations were easily accepted by great masses. Consequently, in early modern age, the Ottomans managed to produce new spatial and architectural scenery. The new scenery was built upon the collage of elements inspired by the architecture of both Eastern and Western cultures, within Ottoman architecture tradition.

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